

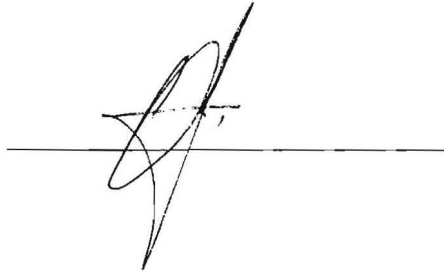
**Gresham Smith Design Competition:
Julia Carson Community Center**

An Honors Thesis (ARCH 302)

by

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Abstract

Architectural design competitions have a manner of evoking the best work capable of designers. Unfortunately, once the jury has convened and awards have been given, the projects are seldom revisited. To justify the long hours of work and further enjoy a completed project, I am reexamining the design of the Julia Carson Community Center as part of the third year Gresham Smith Design Competition. Named in honor of the late State Representative Julia Carson, the proposed community center is for the Fall Creek neighborhood of Indianapolis. Included in the analysis I evaluate whether the project was successful in meeting Julia Carson's mission, feasible and functional for the local culture, and how well the formal architectural design came to fruition. Along with the critical analysis of the third year project outcome, I also researched the John H. Boner Community Center in Indianapolis to supplement my understanding of community center design in a locally pragmatic and critical way.

Acknowledgements

-I would like to thank Gresham Smith and Associates for sponsoring this competition and providing us with a monetary supplement to our Team Award of Excellence.

-I would like to thank Associate Professor Olon Dotson for organizing and compiling the Gresham Smith Design Competition. His investment in the programming for the Julia Carson Community Center was extensive and informative. I also want to thank Olon for his eye-opening Fourth World Theory class, and with my analysis of The John H. Boner Community Center.

-I would like to thank my partner for this competition Colin Marshall, without whom this project would not have been possible. Thank you for all the long hours of work, encouragement, and critical review.

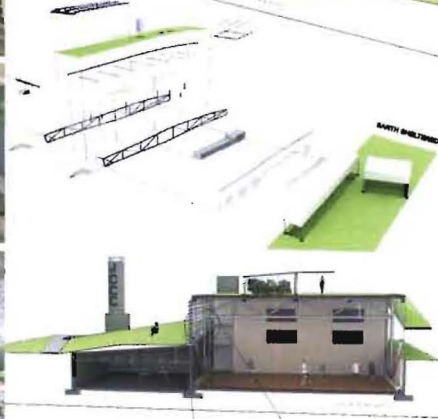
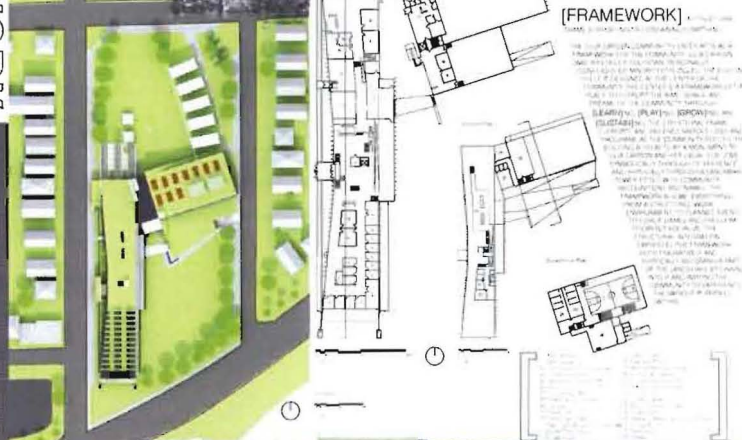
-I would like to thank Sam Carson, Julia Carson's son, for taking the time to review our work, and providing life and inspiration to this project.

-I would like to thank my fiancée Danielle for all her love and support.

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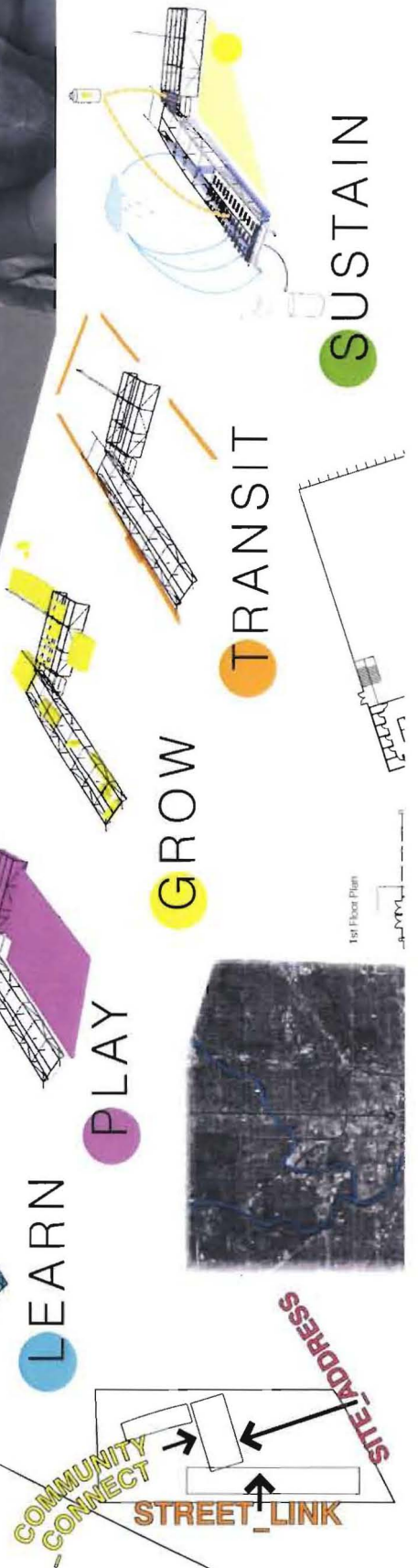
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COMMUNITY [FRAME]WORK





JULIA CARSON COMMUNITY CENTER
2011 GRESHAM SMITH



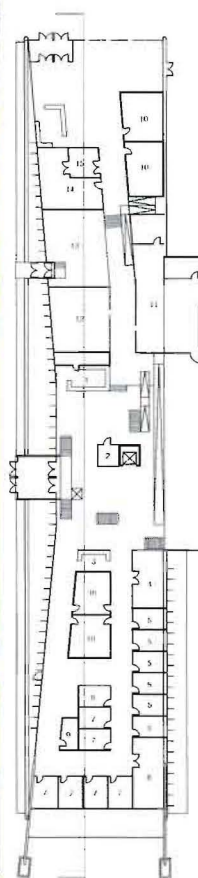
COMMUNITY [FRAME]V

WORK

INK
SITE_ADDRESS

Site Location Plan
NTS

1st Floor Plan

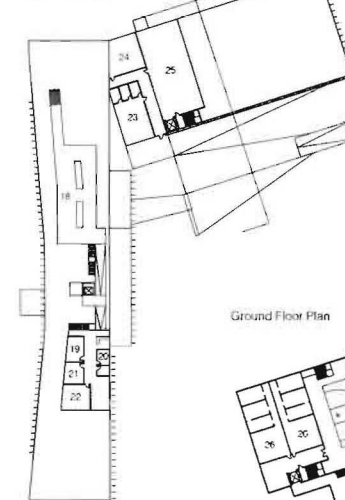


1" = 30'-0"

Site Master Plan

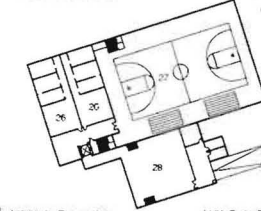
1" = 50'-0"

2nd Floor Plan



1" = 50'-0"

Ground Floor Plan

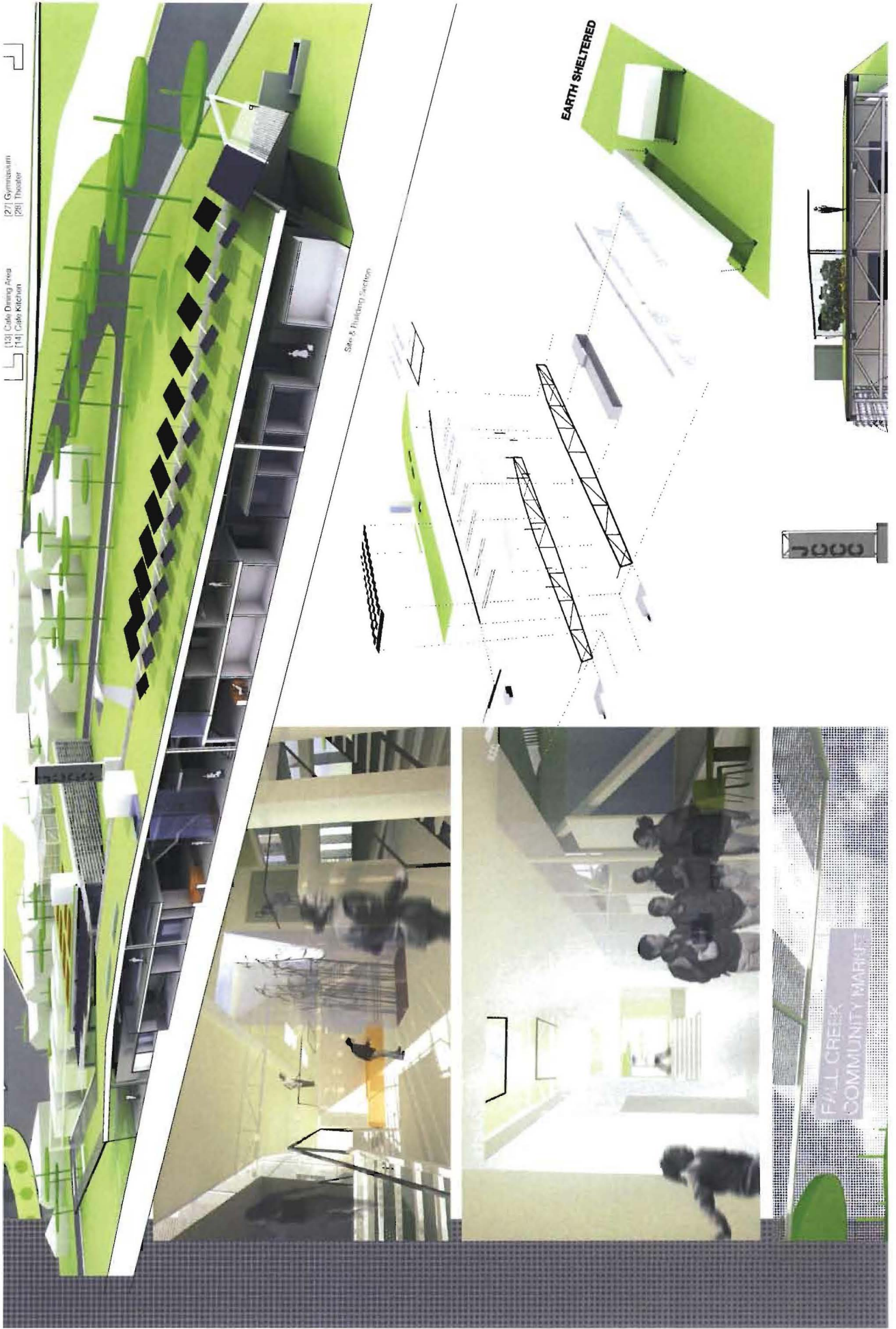


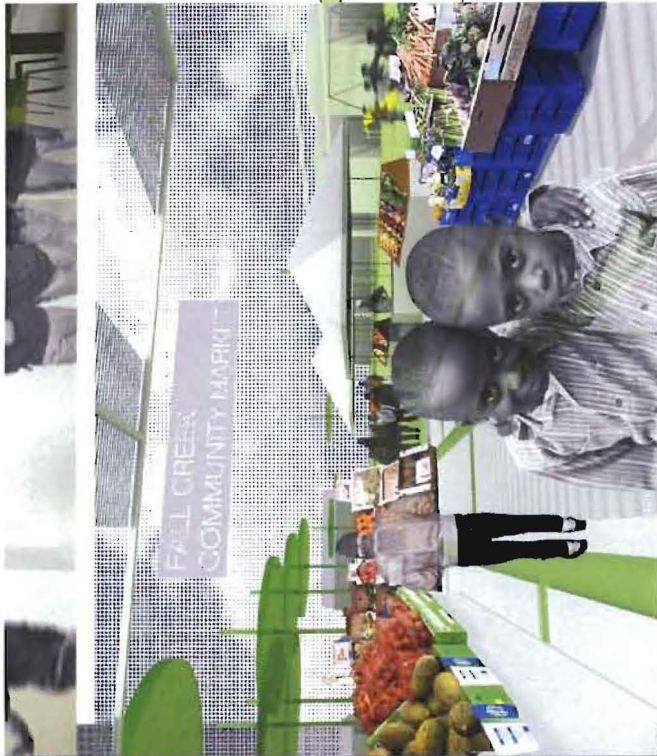
SUSTAIN

[FRAMEWORK] · A STRUCTURAL
FRAME SUPPORTING OR CONTAINING SOMETHING

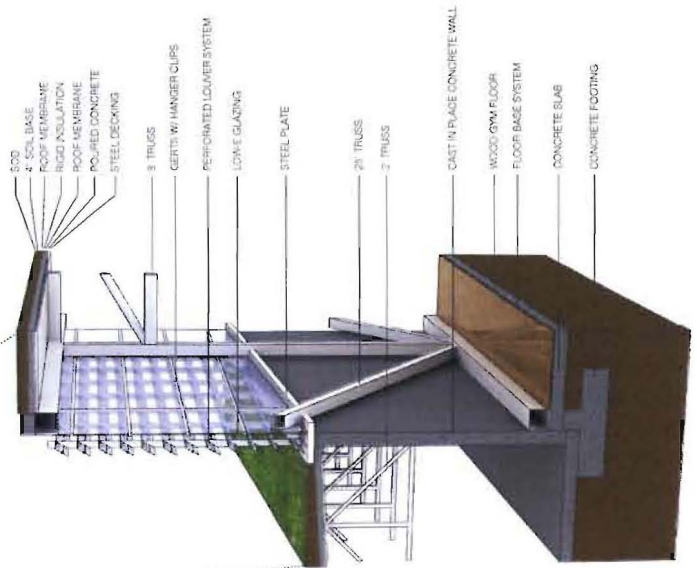
THE JULIA CARSON COMMUNITY CENTER ACTS AS A FRAMEWORK FOR THE COMMUNITY. JULIA CARSON WAS A PEOPLE'S POLITICIAN, PERSONALLY CONSCIOUS OF MINORITY STRUGGLES. THE BUILDING ITSELF IS DESIGNED AS THE CENTER OF THE COMMUNITY. THIS CENTER IS A FRAMEWORK SET IN PLACE TO SUPPORT THE AIMS, GOALS, AND DREAMS OF THE COMMUNITY, THROUGH [LEARN]ING, [PLAY]ING, [GROW]ING, AND [SUSTAIN]ING. THE STRUCTURAL FRAME SUPPORTS AND RECEIVES VARIOUS USES AND PROGRAMS AS THE COMMUNITY SEES FIT. THE BUILDING ALSO ACTS AS A MONUMENT TO JULIA CARSON AND HER LEGACY OF LOVE, SYMBOLICALLY THROUGH ITS PRESENCE, AND PHYSICALLY THROUGH A LANDMARK TOWER FITTED WITH COMMUNITY RECOGNITIONS AND NAMES. THE FRAMEWORK ALLOWS EVERYTHING FROM A STRUCTURED WORK ENVIRONMENT, TO PLANNED EVENTS, TO PICKUP GAMES AND FREEDOM TO OPENLY SOCIALIZE. THE STRUCTURAL INTEGRATION EXPRESSES THE FRAMEWORK BOTH FIGURATIVELY AND PHYSICALLY, BECOMING A PART OF THE LANDSCAPE BY SINKING INTO IT AND INVITING THE COMMUNITY TO EXPERIENCE THE VARIOUS PURPOSES WITHIN.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| [1] Main Reception | [15] Cafe Storage |
| [2] Rain Garden | [16] Massage Rooms |
| [3] Community Services Reception | [17] Manual Massage Therapy |
| [4] Conference Room | [18] Lounge and Gallery |
| [5] General Counseling Offices | [19] Executive Director Office |
| [6] Records | [20] Administrative Assistant |
| [7] Counseling Offices | [21] Deputy Director |
| [8] Multi Purpose Guidance | [22] Conference Room |
| [9] Storage | [23] Music Study and Practice |
| [10] Restrooms | [24] Yoga Studio |
| [11] Memorial Library | [25] Wellness Admin. and Workout Facility |
| [12] Resource Room/Computer Lab | [26] Locker Rooms |
| [13] Cafe Dining Area | [27] Gymnasium |
| [14] Cafe Kitchen | [28] Theater |





Gym & Theater Decking



SOD

4\"/>

ROOF MEMBRANE

ROOF INSULATION

ROOF MEMBRANE

POURED CONCRETE

STEEL DECKING

3 TRUSS

CERTS W/ HANGER CLIPS

PERFORATED LOUVER SYSTEM

LOW-E GLAZING

STEEL PLATE

2\"/>

3 TRUSS

CAST IN PLACE CONCRETE WALL

WOOD GYM FLOOR

FLOOR BASE SYSTEM

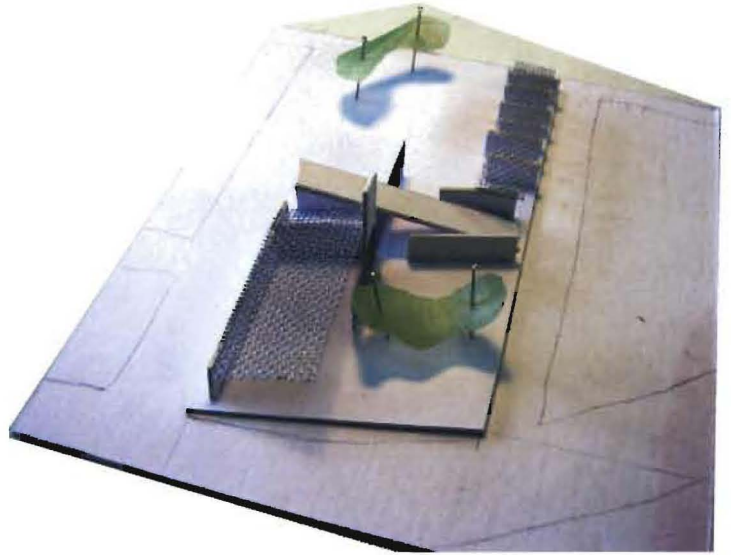
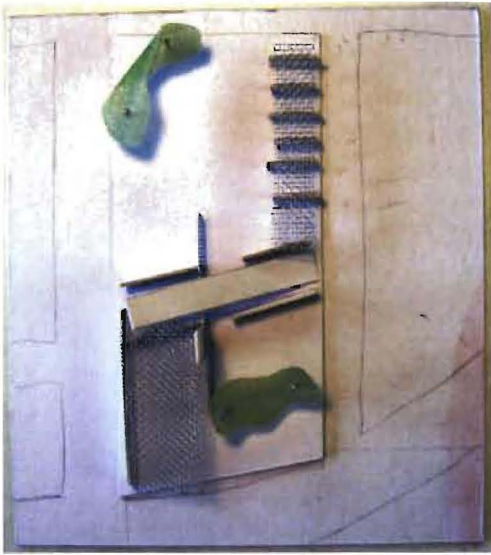
CONCRETE SLAB

CONCRETE FOOTING

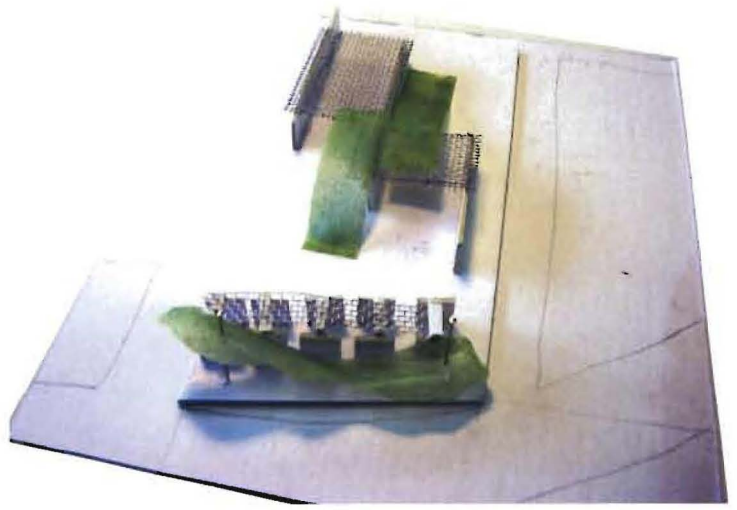
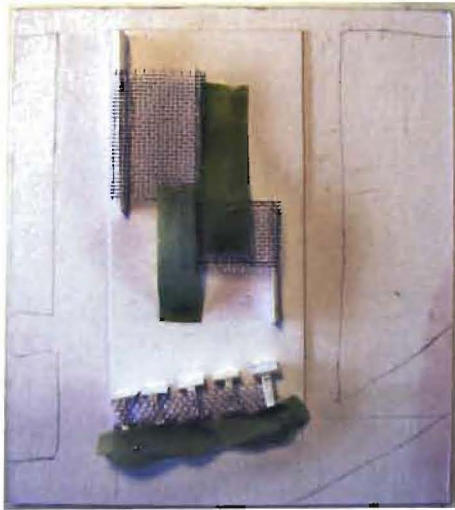


STUDY MODEL EXPLORATION

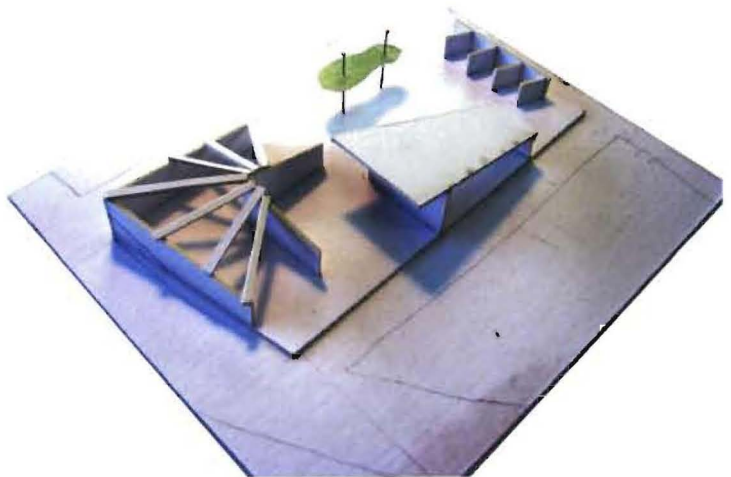
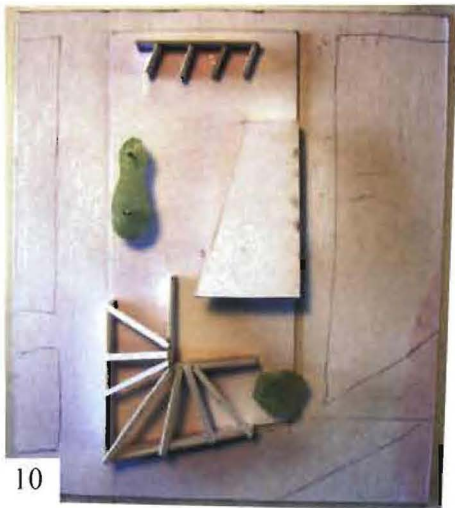
CONCEPT 1



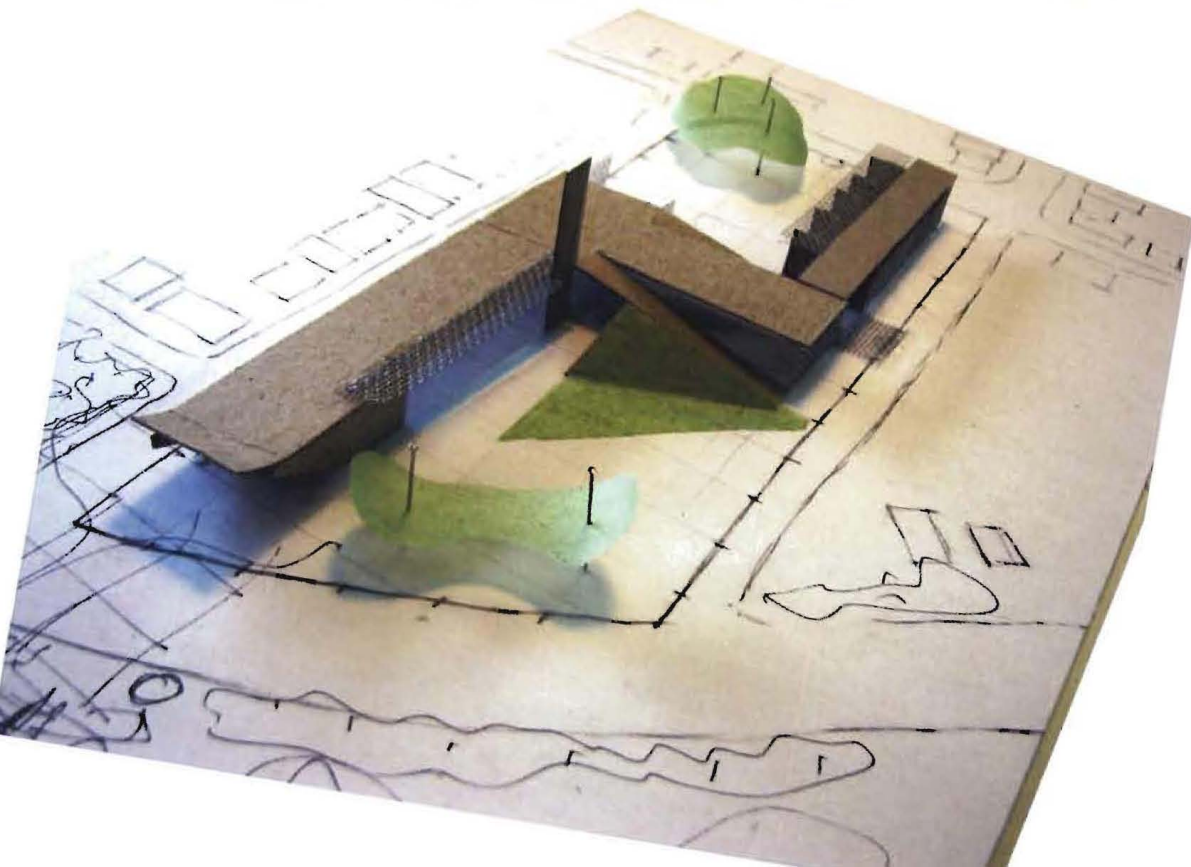
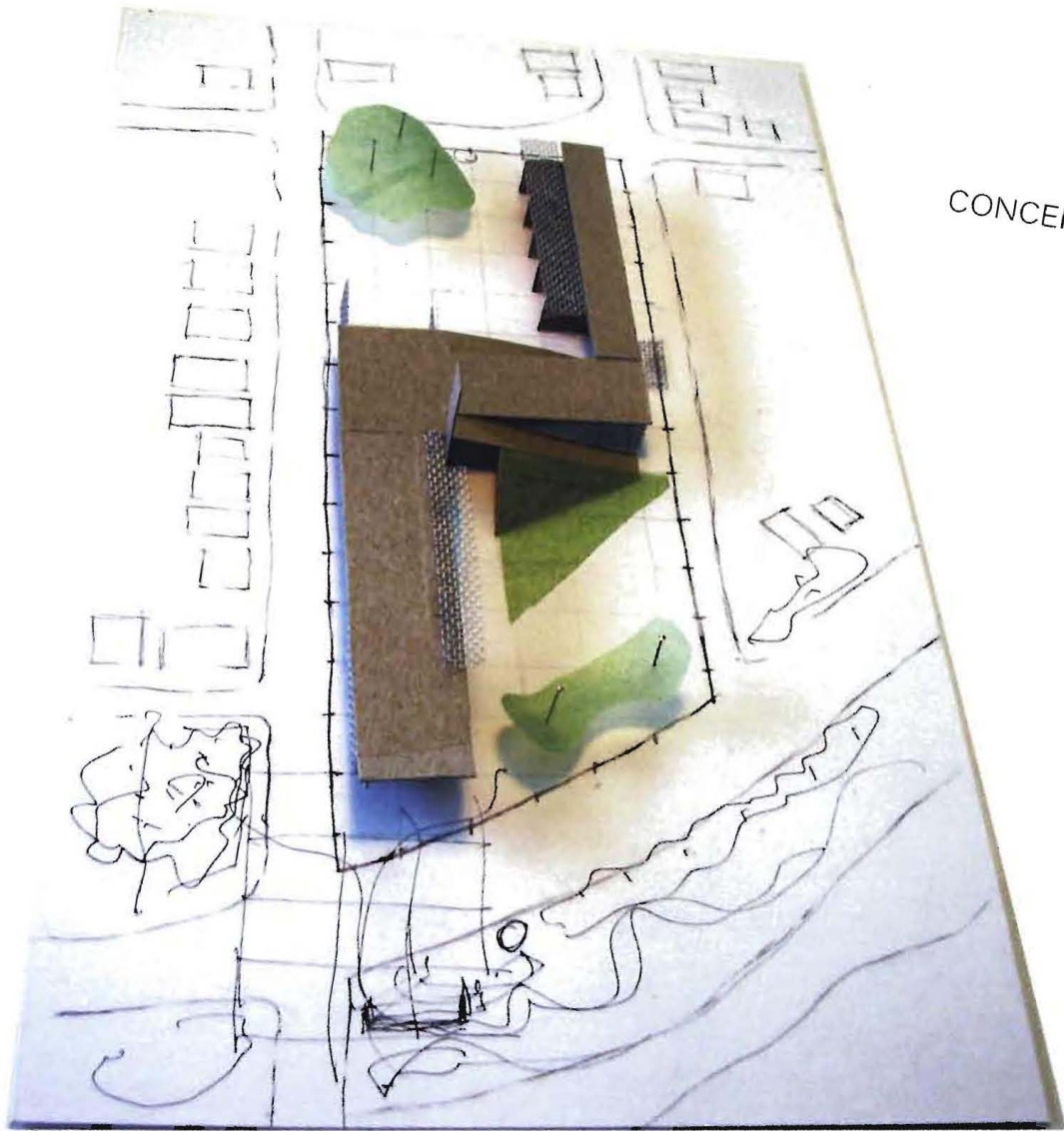
CONCEPT 2



CONCEPT 3

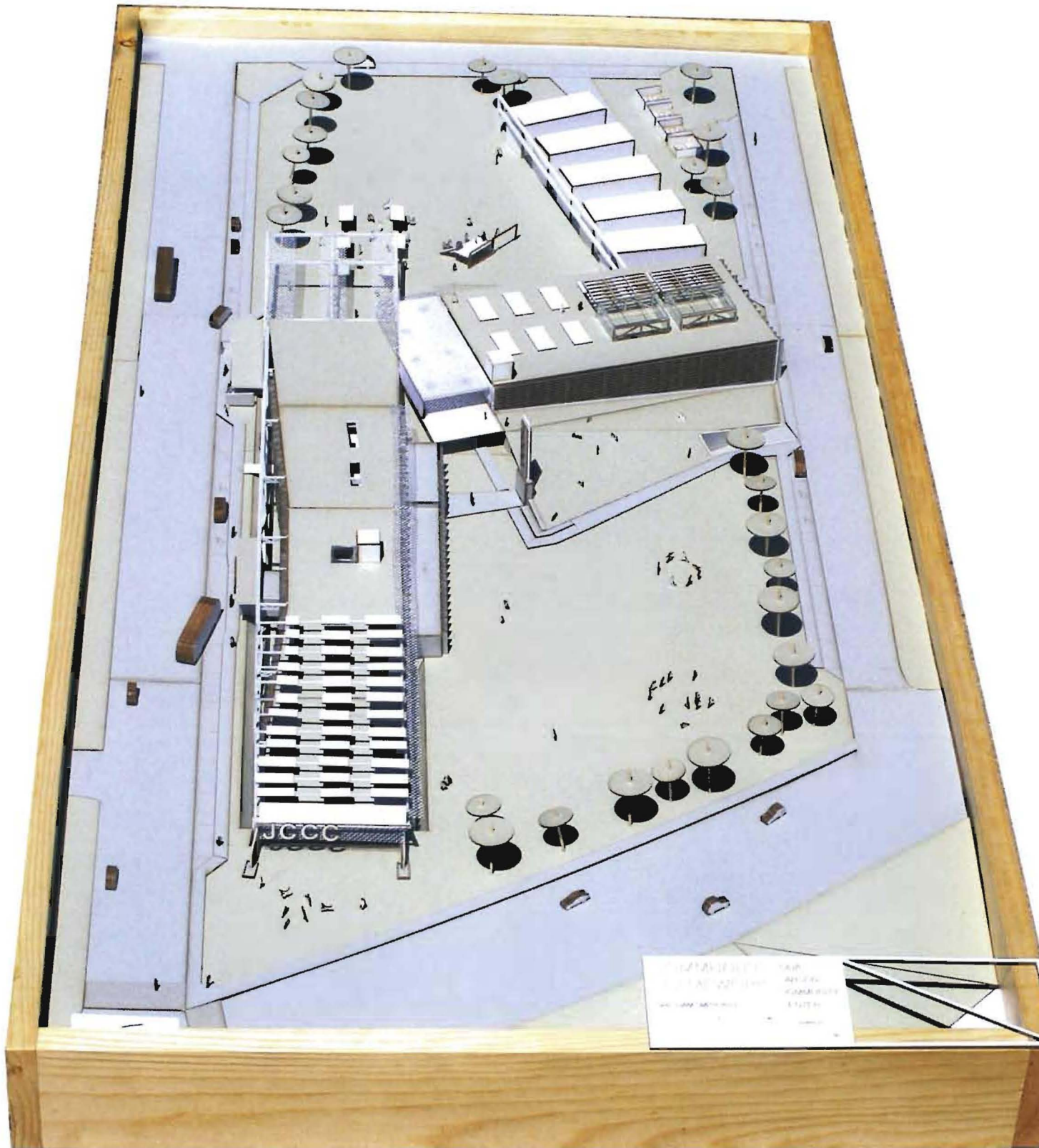


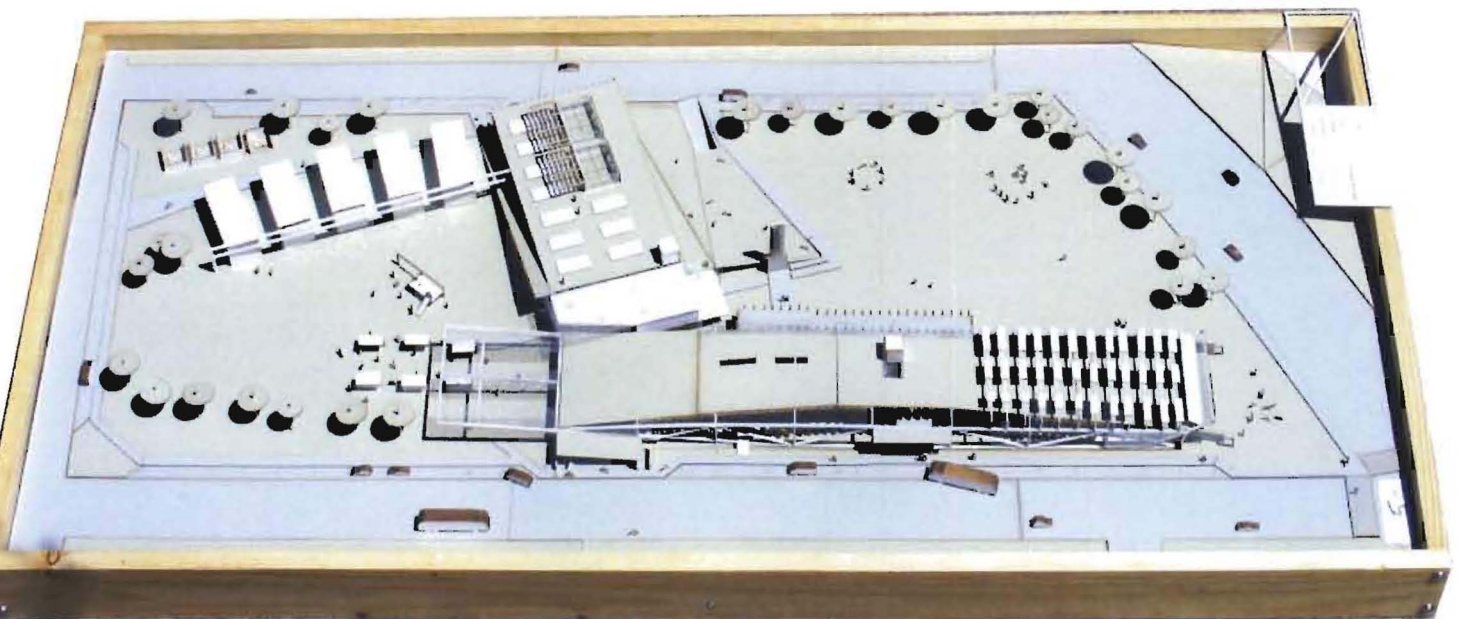
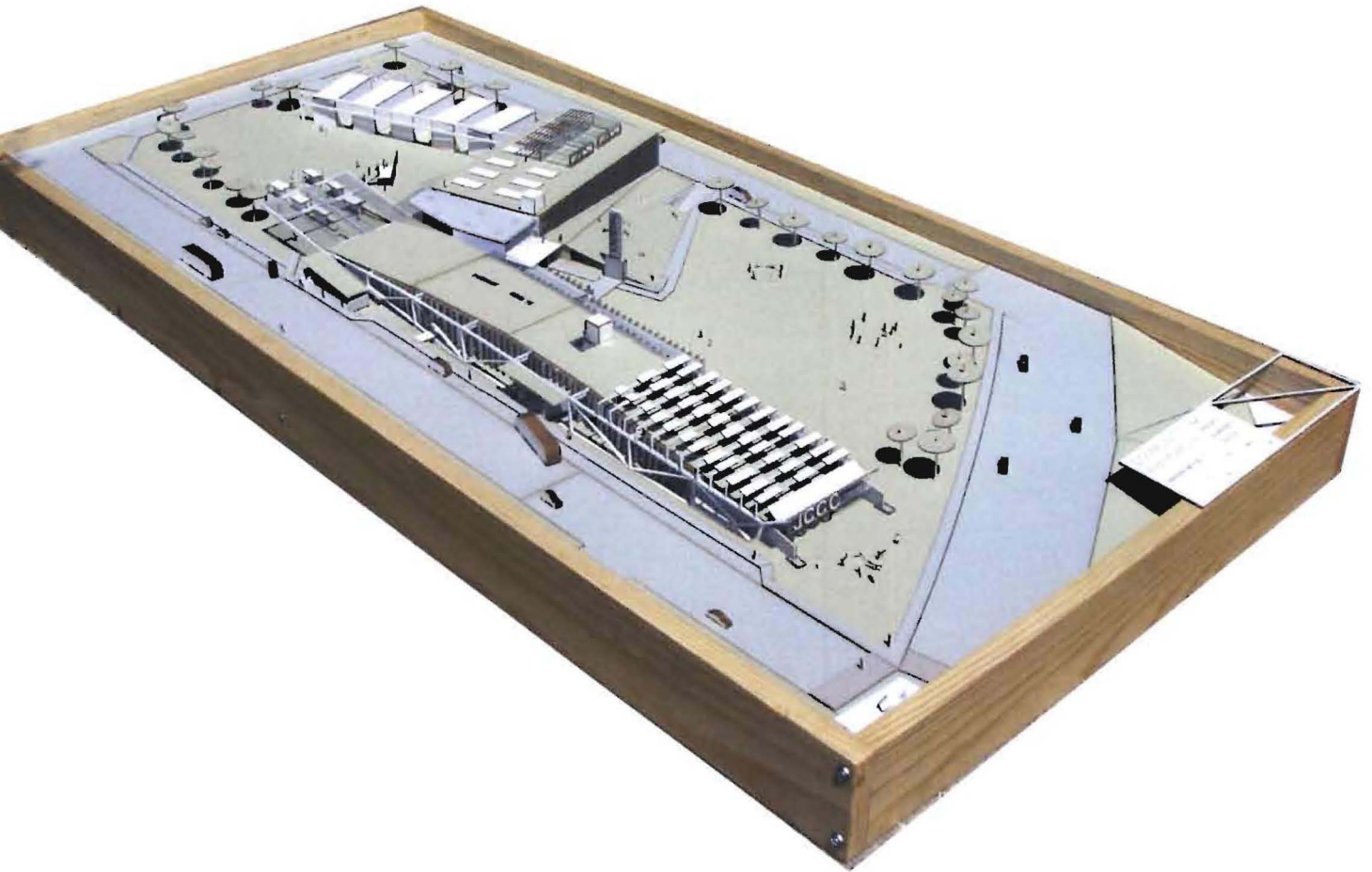
CONCEPT SYNTHESIS



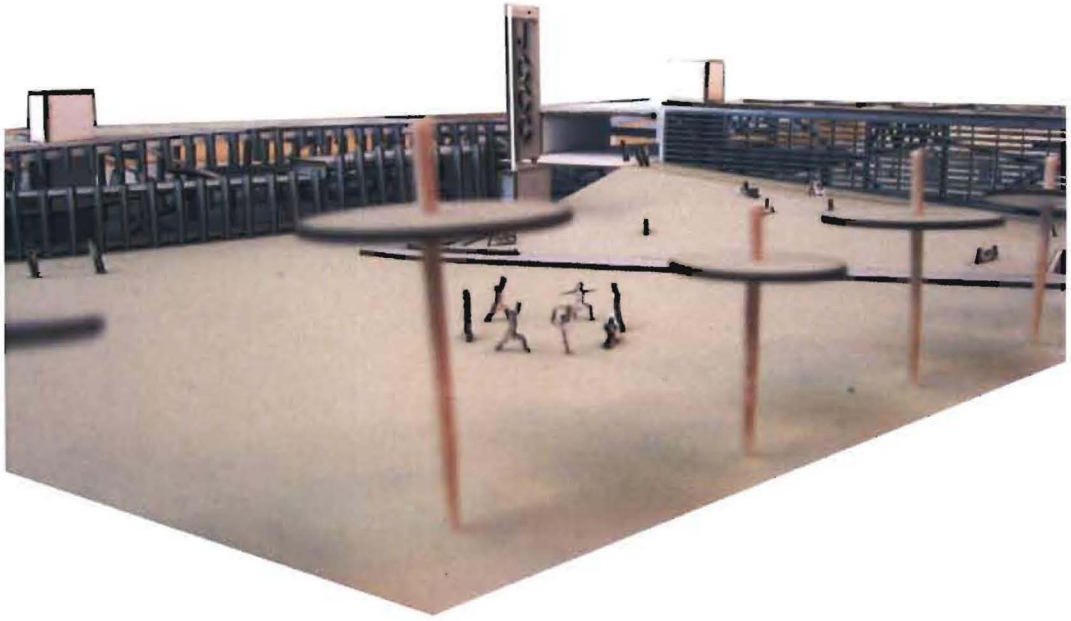
FINISHED MODEL

1/16"=1'-0"

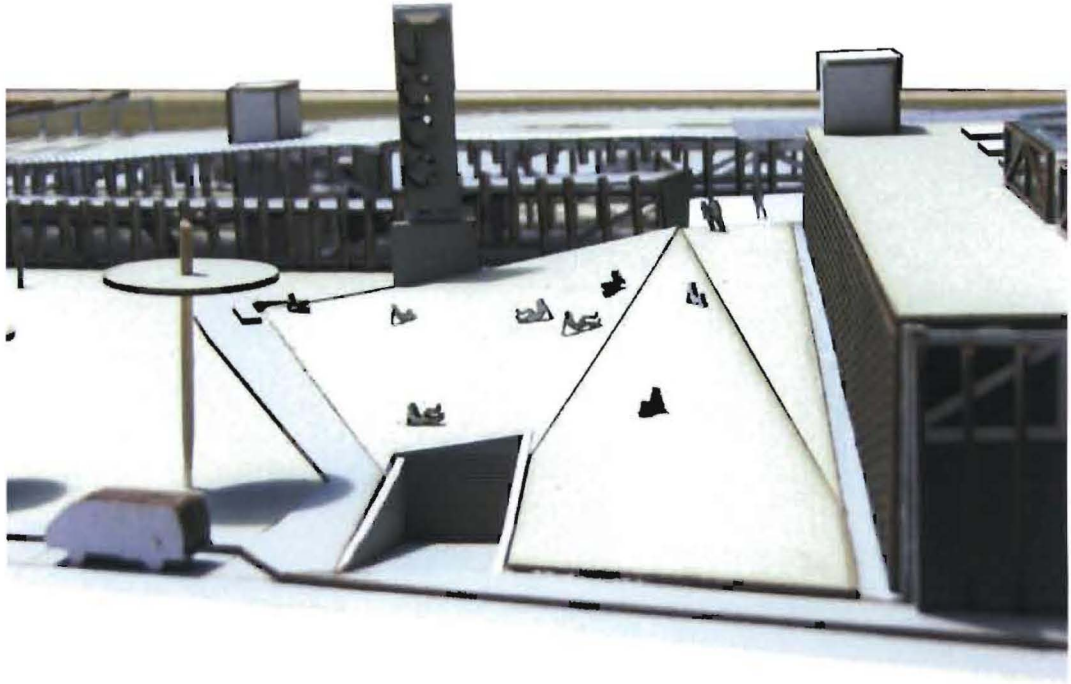




MULTIPURPOSE SPACE

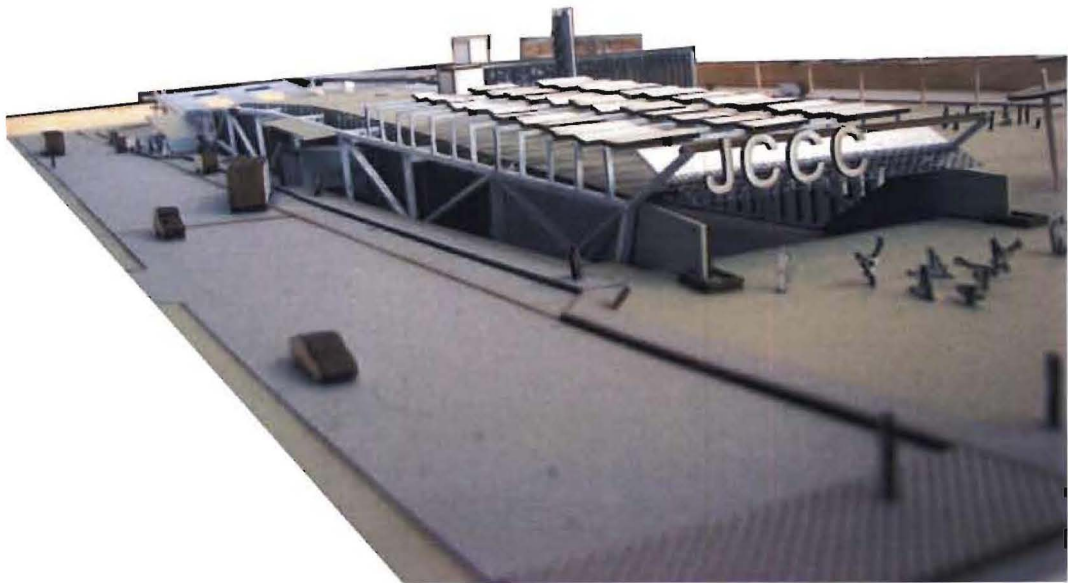


SOCIAL SPACE



MONUMENT LANDMARK





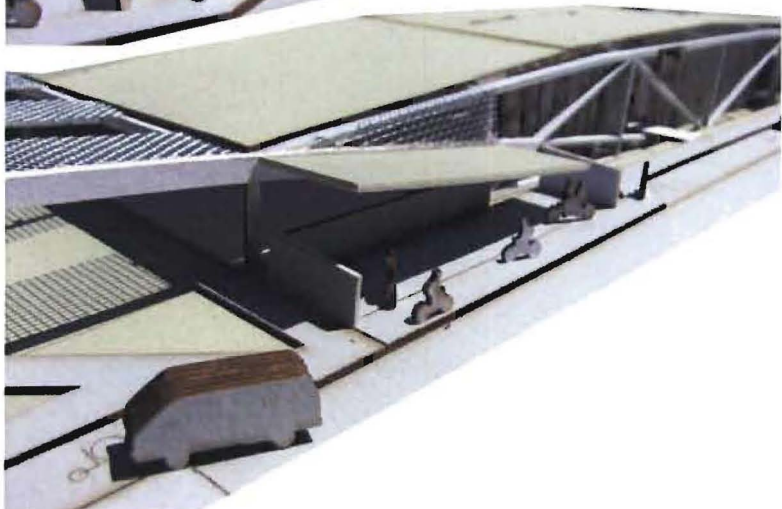
MAIN TRANSIT ENTRANCE



MAIN ENTRANCE



CAFE



BIKE AREA

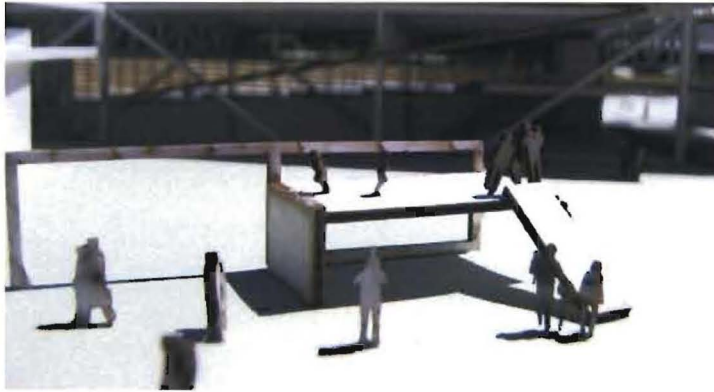
BREAKOUT SPACE



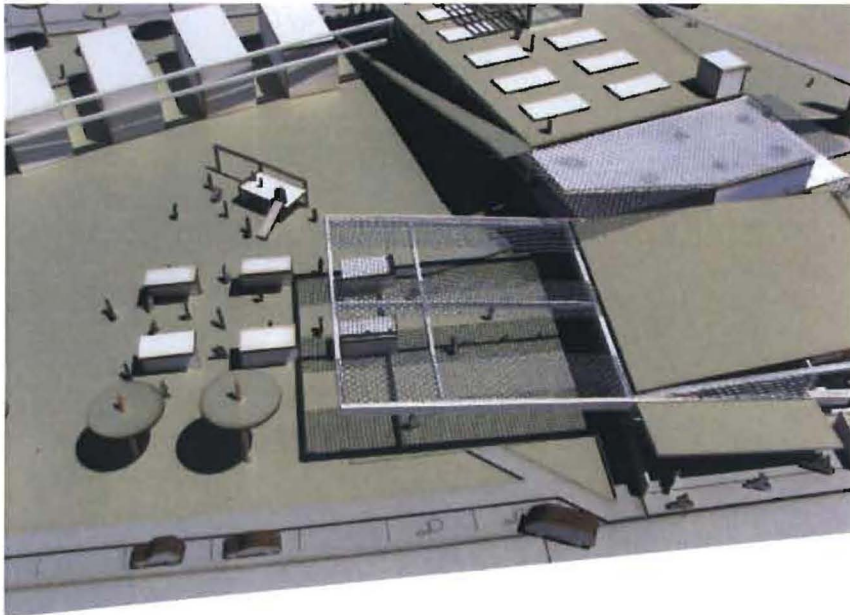
PV PANELS



PLAYGROUND



COMMUNITY MARKET



The Julia Carson Community Center

Competition time is always marked by an increase in intense creative energy and extended working hours. It seems strange that the stress and strain of a competition produces an atmosphere conducive to some of our best work. Yet once the jury is over the energy and drive fades. The goal of this essay is to revisit a past competition and revive some of those feelings, while analyzing the project as a whole.

First of all, working in a group is a blessing and a curse. It may create an easier distribution of work and produce a developed final product, but working with another designer who thinks differently and has different opinions inevitably causes discord. Yet even through the frustration, I came out a better person and a better team player. Much to my partner's credit, the final product could not have reached this caliber without his help.

The design of the Julia Carson Community Center was the Gresham Smith Design Competition for third year. We started the project like many projects before, by analyzing the program and the end goal. Our main focus was to identify what exactly Julia Carson stood for, and to define her mission. This focus was the driving force of our project.

Through the given project statement, it was clear that Julia Carson's path toward becoming a State Representative was shaped by her personal struggles with poverty and racism. She focused on issues that affected the working-class Americans, and was a regular sponsor of children's safety, health, and nutrition legislation. More clearly, Julia's mission was for a just and inclusive society, commitment to community, and love of family. The primary mission of the Community Center would focus on the success of families, youth, and senior citizens through social networking opportunities, family services, and recreational programs. It would serve as a visible catalyst for community health and well being.

Julia's vision has in part come to fruition through the "Legacy of Love Foundation", created to assist those in need with coordinated support services including health care, job training and placement, and interim housing. Our main focus on all of this was to create a

tangible “center” in which to house all of the functions in three main components: a recreation and wellness area, a community services area, and on-site housing. The recreation and wellness area includes dietary health, pre and postnatal health, exercise facilities, and sports programming. The community services area is a “central place” to house the Legacy of Love Foundation and all of its previously mentioned programs and services.

With all of this in mind, my partner and I tried to boil down the essence of the project. We decided that the heart of the mission was focused on people, and that the community center’s basic purpose serves as a central physical location to serve people. Thus we arrived at the concept of a “community framework”.

Framework, as defined by Webster Dictionary, is a structural frame supporting or containing something. The Julia Carson Community Center acts as a framework for the community. Julia Carson was a people’s politician, personally conscious of minority struggles. The building itself is designed as the center of the community. This center is a framework set in place to support the aims, goals, and dreams of the community through learning, playing, growing, and sustaining. The structural frame supports and receives various uses and programs as the community sees fit. The building also acts as a monument to Julia Carson and her legacy of love, symbolically through its presence, and physically through a landmark tower fitted with community recognitions and names. The framework allows everything from a structured work environment, to planned events, to pickup games and freedom to openly socialize. The structural integration expresses the framework both figuratively and physically, becoming a part of the landscape by sinking into it and inviting the community to experience the various purposes within.

With our initial concept in mind, I think it is fair to say that our project does conceptually exceed Julia’s mission. I feel that the project successfully combined the intangible feelings and needs of the community with the tangible presence of the built form through the buildings on site. Is the project feasible for the local community and culture in realistic terms? Seeing as how the extensive use of iconic structural elements, glazing, and corrugated metal make up most of

the building, it would exceed the budget of any community service center. If there were wealthy private interest groups then the project could certainly have a chance to be built.

Is the project culturally feasible? Based upon my research and critical analysis of the John H. Boner Community Center, I would say that the offered programs and services could definitely see communal sustainability if maintained and invested into. The building itself may prove too modern a design, however the Legacy Center reviewed in the analysis of the Boner Community Center does provide validity for the presence of architectural “high design” in a blighted community. The Legacy Center infuses modern esthetics with an overall slanting form gesturing toward the sky and the upward march of the community, with the functional and sustainable aspects of a green roof and community green houses to support it.

This intervention provides some hope to the iconic, stylized, and modern form of our community center for the competition. The idea is that a well designed and beautiful building would encourage community investment and care over the site, and promote a sense of pride or worth for the residents. If the building could appear on the cover of *Architectural Digest*, yet reside in the midst of a blighted community, then perhaps the community members would find a sense of ownership rewarding and uplifting.

Crime would obviously be an issue, and the local culture would have to take hold of the site as they see fit. I still feel that the project could function well given the right amount of investment from the community. It would fail if it was not accessible to all and run by a diverse range of community members, much like the successful John H. Boner center.

I also feel that the overall form of the site and buildings was handled well. The structural integration and exposed truss system was in the works from the beginning, but began to take shape as the project progressed. One of my favorite gestures of the project is the main entrance side of the building where the building pulls away from the major truss, exposing the structure and creating bridges that connect to the building, allowing room for light to enter the lower levels.

The glaring problem with our design solution is the meeting point between the community services building and the recreation and wellness building. Although the created knuckle does allow for a bridge like suspension over a direct pedestrian connection between the community market and the southern program field, we never quite reconciled the two pieces together. The connector awkwardly smashes into the corner of the community services building and attaches to the back of the recreation and wellness facility. This problem could have risen partly because a large amount of the project was designed initially in section and then edited in plan.

The form of the project arose through a series of diagrammatic and formal model studies that were synthesized and edited together. The quick and dirty method of design produced dynamic architectural instances and spaces. We chose the best of each attempt and reached a combined resolution.

In seeking some sense of a realistic scenario, I researched the John H. Boner center and conducted a critical analysis. This echoes and supplements the competition and provides a framework for community intervention in the existing Indianapolis area. The research conducted on the John H. Boner Community Center analyzes the history and foundation of the existing community and parallels our conceptual endeavor.

In conclusion, this project has taught me the importance of the human element in architectural design, and honed my sense of systems integration. The completed project is certainly something that my partner and I are proud to display, having won the Team Award of Excellence and been featured with other students on the *Arch Daily* architecture blog. Researching the John H. Boner center also provided some insight into the structural and cultural developments that led to the area's demise, and shed light on an existing community center's strengths and weaknesses.

The John H. Boner Community Center and the Near Eastside

A tangible reminder of the power of community integrity and effort, The John H. Boner Community Center lies at the heart of the Near Eastside of Indianapolis. It serves to improve the quality of life of the area by providing tools for change and growth. The center hopes to see the Near Eastside as a “vibrant, thriving community” (“JHBCC”). Through many years of growth as a neighborhood, and through many struggles, the spirit of fellowship has fostered healthy social and cultural community life. This essay seeks to critically analyze the John H. Boner Community Center and the Near Eastside neighborhoods, by how they address local issues through community initiatives, services, and programs.

The community now known as the Near Eastside originally began in 1849 when some of the Governor’s farmland was platted into a subdivision. It later developed to include the small town of Woodruff Place, and by the end of the 1880’s became an area of elite residences and booming development. The area continued to see growth in the coming years until the 1950’s when it experienced declining population. The middle class began to leave toward the suburbs as the Near Eastside became part of the “inner-city” (Polis Center).

In 1962 Woodruff Place lost a long-running court battle to remain an incorporated town, and now was considered part of the City of Indianapolis. This caused many long-time residents to move out to quieter suburban homes. New owners moved in and subdivided the old resident homes into apartments. By 1967, surveys of the Near Eastside neighborhoods showed housing deterioration, conflicting land-use patterns, rising crime rates, increased level of welfare dependency, and racial tensions, in part due to suburban flight. By 1970, almost 50% of residents had moved into the area within the last two years, and 53% of the demographic were renters rather than homeowners (Polis Center). This increased the stress and strain on the well-being of the neighborhoods.

Yet through it all the Near Eastside revitalized a sense of community and founded NESCO, the Near Eastside Community Organization, in 1970 to coordinate activities between

neighborhoods and promote social services. The next year, NESCO determined there was a need for a neighborhood social service center, and in 1971, The Eastside Multi-Service Center was born under the leadership of John H. Boner (Polis Center). In humble beginning, He and Dick Moore started with only a card table and two folding chairs in an office on East Tenth Street (JHBCC). Although physical conditions still suffered, a survey of the area residents recorded a fair to good environment among the best in the near downtown area, largely due to their community initiative (Polis Center).

This energy continued to fuel revitalization throughout the 1980's and 90's as community members banded together. According to one source; "in founding NESCO, they became a powerful common voice, one which continues to speak with them and for them" (NESCO). The Eastside Multi-Service Center was later renamed in honor of John H. Boner, a tribute to the social and cultural sustainability that the center offers, promising increased future development to a community banded together. From humble beginnings, the physical facility has developed into a vibrant architectural symbol of hope.

The spirit of the community is thus symbolically embodied by the center, helping to combat negative influences of the area. Their mission is to "build a community where people want to live, work, and leave an impact" through a welcoming and active environment that facilitates relationship development, the cultivation of leadership, and good community stewardship (JHBCC). The center also strives to maintain diversity and "recognize and celebrate a society of different individuals...and equal opportunity," promoting an atmosphere of inclusion and belonging. These diversity goals include creating awareness, inclusive culture, maintaining accountability, outreach, business and community relationships, and ongoing learning (JHBCC). Even the leadership and staff meet certain diversity criteria, and actually go through a diversity audit regularly to maintain accountability. The summation of these attitudes further demonstrates the collaboration the Near Eastside community strives to support.

The Near Eastside is comprised of 20 distinct neighborhoods with about 40,000 residents.

They all share a uniquely strong sense of history and dedication to community development. Out of the nearly 40,000 residents only 10,660 are actually recorded as clients to the center. Demographically, the area is made up of 50% females and 50% males, and racially 67% Caucasian, 23% African-American, and 10% Hispanic. Although there is more than twice the number of Caucasians in the area as African-Americans, 60% of the center's clients are African-American and only 24% are Caucasian. This statistic solidifies the argument toward the concentration of poverty among inner-city blacks. The largest percentage of clients also falls into the prime age range of 22-40, making it likely for them to have families to take care of (JHBCC).

Positively, 86% of the population age 16+ was employed in the 2002 census. Regardless, 43% of the population had a household income of less than \$20,000 a year, hovering just above the poverty line for a family of four. While the neighborhoods do see mixed levels of incomes and executive level employees, many people work in service industries, and over half of households only had 1 or 2 residents ("Poverty Guidelines"). These statistics still do not negate the fact that parts of the community are disadvantaged, for whatever reason, and require or gladly accept aid from the John H. Boner Community Center and its affiliates.

The Near Eastside has been given a "bad rap" through increasing numbers of abandoned homes and all types of crime. The social and physical pictures of life help to frame the neighborhood statistics, and shed light into the services provided by the Boner Center. With an estimated number of abandoned dwellings reaching four digits, rental properties have taken over as the primary means of housing for residents. Fair or accessible housing for the poor, homeless, or terminally ill is a real fourth world issue for some people in the area. The Boner Center manages nearly 200 units of affordable housing for just these individuals, with rent based upon an individual's income and ability to pay (JHBCC). The gracious fulfillment of a basic human need then promotes incentive for individuals to improve their quality of life, especially the homeless.

While dilapidated structures provide visible reminders of poverty, the homeless in the area seem to be invisible to most of society. “The homeless are basically just everyday people, just like you and myself...you wouldn’t know they were homeless because of the availability of shelters where they can go in and they can clean up, but they are out there, so you never really know” (Payne 60). The John Boner Center reaches those that many overlook, further emphasizing their inclusive communal spirit. Many different housing options and programs are available to meet a range of needs, from supporting at-risk families to special needs housing. While the extent of the actual facilities available for rent is small, the gesture is overwhelmingly hopeful and positive, and sets the stage for further development.

Another major problem for the Near Eastside has been the lack of educational opportunities and youth resources. Even the Indianapolis Public School System has not been able to avoid the damaging effects of urban sprawl and thinning population density. As summarized by Michael Katz in *The “Underclass” Debate*, “By concentrating poor and minority children in inner-city schools, the reorganization of social space has intensified the educational problems of urban schoolchildren” (Katz 401). The Boner center has fought hard against these issues and even partnered with IPS through the 21st Century program to provide “a safe and fun out-of-school learning experience” (JHBCC). Their children and youth services focus on the academic, social, and developmental needs so important in breaking generational poverty and feelings of worthlessness. By attacking the problems at the start, the hope is to provide a better prepared group of individuals to lead the future.

Other schools have also been revitalized in the area, further promoting the community effort seen through the Boner Center. The nearby Oaks Academy said that “a healthy neighborhood depends on a successful, thriving school.” With inspiration from the Bible in Isaiah 61, “They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated,” physically reclaiming an old building as their facility (Oaks Academy). Another ray of hope shines through Arsenal Technical High school and the recent Chase Legacy Center. As part of the bid for the

2012 Super Bowl, the National Football League donated \$1 million to start the Legacy Center, followed by \$11 million in community raised funds to ensure the project's completion. As an extension of the John H. Boner Center, the new building resides on the campus of Arsenal Technical High School. It serves as a major hub for comprehensive, holistic programming, health and wellness activities, and an education extension of the school (JHBCC). The modern "high-design" of the building also innately instills hope and pride into the community.

The Boner Center genuinely tries to provide excellent facilities and services to the "truly disadvantaged." As discussed in William Julius Wilson's book bearing the same name, Wilson lays out the typical situation:

Minority individuals from the most advantaged families are likely to be disproportionately represented among the minority members most qualified for preferred positions—such as higher-paying jobs, college admissions, promotions, and so forth. Accordingly, if policies of preferential treatment for such positions are conceived not in terms of the actual disadvantages suffered by individuals but rather in terms of race or ethnic group membership, then these policies will further enhance the opportunities of the more advantaged without addressing the problems of the truly disadvantaged. (Wilson 115)

The Boner Center directly challenges and breaks this stereotypical policy by actually reaching to serve those most in need, and most fundamentally important, by taking care of the needs of its community.

While many people in the area are employed, and possibly due to the lack of access to the "preferred positions" listed above, some people in the community still struggle to increase their quality of life. The Boner Center offers job training and marketing opportunities with an on site resource center for job hunting and development of basic skills (JHBCC). It seems fundamental, but one homeless individual stressed this point about community programs and outreach: "They want to do something, then they should survey and find out how many people want to work. Start

right now. How about: ‘Can I take you down here and get you a job? [I would say,] ‘Yeah! Let’s do that” (Payne 76).

The center also provides financial coaching, education, and step by step help at making ends meet. As a reminder of “real” conditions, one man’s life was completely changed through the help of the Boner Center’s Financial Foundations program. He wrote the following poem to the staff that guided him:

I drank my booze, smoked my crack, with each new day, I never looked back.
I had no pride or an ounce of shame, it didn’t matter what was to blame. I used
to think that soon I’ll be dead, from things I’ve done to words I have said.
Crackhouse to crackhouse, to an empty shed, places where people don’t care if
you’re dead. Fifty-one years and I’m still around, and I’ve become unblinded, a
new path I found. To care about my future, to care about me, and to know there is
love, all around me.

The John Boner Center truly serves to revitalize the community through its financial efforts and job assistance, but, most importantly the center serves to revitalize human beings and remind them of their importance, purpose, and self worth.

The John Boner Center reminds people that they *are* the community. The Near Eastside is more than just buildings, and streets, and programs, and organizations. The Near Eastside, the John Boner Center, and the community at large, are *individuals*. Social policy and programming can serve to dehumanize the population, while the John H. Boner Center and NESCO serve as reminders of the power of the intimate spirit present within the blighted community. Even if the physical conditions might be sub-par, the social and cultural conditions are--on the grass roots level--growing into something fruitful.

The sustainability of the John Boner Center seems to play an important role in the development of the area, yet there are still some issues that lie outside the reach of revitalization. There still remains the far-reaching and deeply engrained disproportion of poverty stricken inner-

city blacks. It seems that the implications of this problem remain far away from any community resolution at this time. Also, the mass transit systems of Indianapolis are still lacking and could be improved, mainly the IndyGo bus system. Although the Boner Center does provide some transportation services to participants, the need is still greatly disproportionate to the service. Finally, the incredible power of drugs and the informal economy continue to harm the area even with services in place.

The momentum of the Near Eastside has been refreshing and inspiring; bringing hope to a community that not long ago had much less to offer. The success of the John H. Boner Community Center is in part due to the fact that it meets needs that previously went unmet, but possibly more directly, the success is found in a deep sense of community that has been a part of the development for decades. While the John H. Boner Center may serve as the symbolic heart of the community, it is important to note that the fight against the fourth world issues of the Near Eastside neighborhoods is entirely a joint effort of many organizations under NESCO. The center almost appears like a figure-head because of the rich widespread community growth outside its walls. Yet the term is falsely misleading, because the center does practice what it preaches, and leads not just with a building but with actions, people, and works to back it up.

The John H. Boner Community Center is far from perfect, and the services and programs currently reach only about one fourth of the recorded community, but the Near Eastside is certainly better off than before. It seems that the Near Eastside follows the theory that many small interventions will begin to produce sustaining results, unlike the large programs that topple once the foundation is removed from underneath. The grass roots beginning of the John H. Boner Community Center continues to solidify this theory. The combined effort shown throughout this study proves the validity behind the creation of the Julia Carson Community Center, and although the project may seem like one large intervention, it is in reality made up of many constituent parts, people, and organizations to help facilitate its formation.

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